

Is Catholic Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Justifiable?

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*"From henceforth all generations shall call me blessed,
because He that is mighty hath done great things to me
(Luke i, 48, 49).*

IT is indeed right and seemly that on this, the Feast of Our Blessed Lady's triumph, the subject allotted for this evening's lecture should be a vindication of Mary's glorious place in the Church of Christ and in the hearts of her devoted children. To those of us who are the heirs of faith, there is nothing unreasonable or incongruous in the Catholic devotion to Mary. Our love for her, our confidence in her maternal regard for us, and our realization of her most benign influence with God, are part and parcel of our Christianity. But there are those others who do not understand Mary, those who, not knowing the Son of God, do not know His virginal Mother, and who, unaware of her exalted privileges, and of the sublime relations between her and our Divine Redeemer, look coldly askance on her, and ridicule what they term our extravagant enthusiasm.

When Christ Himself commissioned His Apostles to prosecute the purpose for which He came on earth, He emphatically gave to them tremendous authority: "Teach ye all nations . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be condemned." And so the Church is the final arbiter in matters of faith; but as a corollary to this there fol-

lows her authority in the matter of that faith's expression. If with the Divine sanction behind her she demands belief in mysteries of religion, hers is also the right and the authority to define how faith in these mysteries shall be externated by the faithful. To quote one dogma as an illustration, the Church teaches that Christ is really present in the Blessed Eucharist, and, secure in her belief in this infinite mystery, she reverentially determines what ceremonies and devotional practices shall cluster round the tabernacle where the King of Love sits enthroned.

THE BEAUTIFUL DEVOTIONS OF THE CHURCH

It is because of this Christ-given authority regulating the outward expression of faith that the Catholic Church is, and has always been, so grand an inspirer of devotional practices. Thus the beautiful variety of approved devotions that flourish around her altars—devotions to God the Creator, devotions to God the Redeemer, devotions to God the Sanctifier, and devotions to the Saints, the friends of God, who share His glory in heaven. Not only are the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost adored and glorified on those feasts that commemorate the mysteries of their infinite condescension towards men, but also the days of the year are crowded with loving anniversaries and enthusiastic pageants in honor of the Apostles and Confessors, the Virgins and the Martyrs, the illustrious servants of God, who demonstrated with such heroic fortitude their love of God and loyalty to holy religion.

THE SPECIAL DEVOTIONS TO OUR LADY

But devotions to all these Saints occupy only a secondary rank when compared to the devotions practiced in honor of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God. We celebrate the triumphs of other Saints by dedicating one day to their memory, we have recourse to their intercession in some special need, but such honor and veneration fall far short of the worship which we give so spontaneously to her who is "our tainted nature's solitary boast." The Church regards every incident in her life as worthy of commemoration, and assigns feasts to each of her glo-

rious privileges. Her Immaculate Conception, her Nativity, her Presentation in the Temple, her glorious Assumption into Heaven, are so many tremendous events and occasions of holy transports to her loving children. Nor is the Church content with the dedication of certain days for her special veneration: she has actually consecrated to her memory the old world's most beautiful month—the fragrant month of May—during which the whole Catholic Church celebrates her praises and acclaims her queenly virtues.

It is, therefore, very evident that Mary occupies a very prominent place in the Catholic Church. The purpose of this lecture tonight is to lay before you the reasonableness of the preëminence which we, her children, claim for her.

NON-CATHOLIC OBJECTIONS TO HONORING MARY

To us who are Catholics devotion to Mary is apparently appropriate and obviously logical. Indeed, without this devotion the Church would seem to us a strange city, devoid of some of the sweetest attractions that appealed to us; but the viewpoint of our friends without the fold with regard to this matter is very different to ours. In fact, strange and incredible though it may appear to us, the Catholic attitude towards Mary is to many outsiders a scandal and a stumbling-block. It is rather unusual nowadays to have to listen to the old threadbare and time-worn calumny that Catholics adore the Virgin, but other objections just as monstrous and misleading are raised against us. There is quite a variety, though not a charming one, of these objections, but they may be all boiled down and reduced to these two, which are a sort of concentrated tabloid of Protestant misunderstandings in regard to this matter:

1. Non-Catholics who question our devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary attribute to us extravagant unreasonableness in according to an ordinary woman such a wealth of homage.

2. Furthermore, they assert that we detract from the worship which is Christ's due when our cult of His Mother is so extraordinary.

These objections are of no weight in as far as we

ourselves are likely to be worried by them, for we do not regard Mary as an ordinary woman—nay, we claim for her that she is the most privileged among the daughters of Eve, the most perfect ever created by God the Father, the greatest woman who ever lived on earth. And we attribute to her all this greatness because she is the Mother of God. Being so exalted, she is no ordinary woman, for in her Divine maternity is her outstanding distinction. It is the prerogative which places her higher than all God's other Saints.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN NO ORDINARY WOMAN

The objection, therefore, that Mary is an ordinary woman contains a fundamental error; in fact, the statement can be made only by those who lose sight of the fact that Mary is the Mother of God, and not merely of the human nature of Jesus Christ. With regard to this matter, the vast majority of modern Protestants go far beyond Luther and Calvin, the founders of their respective systems. These two never questioned Mary's title to Divine maternity; in fact, Luther went so far as to claim for her freedom from all sin because she is the Mother of God. But Protestantism has developed its unbelief with the centuries, and as there is evident an ever-growing tendency to minimize—yea, rather to deny—Christ's Divinity, so there is evident, too, a desire to detract from Mary's greatest dignity. This being so, we need not wonder at the coldness—nay, the positive antagonism—of many non-Catholics towards our Blessed Lady; nor, with this error as the root and reason of their attitude, can we be surprised when they hold aloof from us in our characteristic regard for her.

And we honor Mary so singularly because she is the Mother of God. If she were not the Mother of God she would indeed be an ordinary woman, the holiest and purest and best that ever lived, perhaps, but still underserving of that worship short of being Divine which we pay to her. But if, on the other hand, she is the Mother of God, then in the reality of this prerogative is the vindication of our peculiar devotion towards her. Any honor we pay her is but a fulfillment of God's behest. He honored her beyond all other women, and if an

earthly son is solicitous and eager for the reverence that his mother shall receive, how much more infinitely must Christ, the Son of God, be concerned with regard to the love and veneration bestowed by His disciples on the virginal being whom He had found worthy of so glorious a dignity! If she is the Mother of God, her honor becomes the honor of her Son, and indifference to her means indifference to Christ.

MARY THE MOTHER OF GOD

To realize the force of this argument, we must always remember that Mary, in virtue of her divine motherhood, is just as truly the Mother of God as any human mother is the mother of her own child. According to our Faith, there are two natures in Christ, the Divine nature and the human nature; but, nevertheless, there is only one Person, and that Person is divine—the Person of God the Son. This Person was born of the Virgin Mary in virtue of the hypostatic or substantial union which was effected between it and the human nature at the moment of conception. Therefore, when we say that Mary is the Mother of God, we do not mean that she is merely the Mother of Christ's human nature, for then she would be the mother of a man, not of God; neither do we mean that Christ owed His divine personality to Mary in the sense that it came into being only at the moment of conception. A Divine Person cannot begin His existence in time, nor owe His existence to a creature: He must necessarily be from all eternity. What we do hold is that the moment of Christ's conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary was the beginning of that substantial union the result of which is the God-Man, at once Divine in person, yet assuming as His own a human nature.

THE INSTINCT OF HOLY REVERENCE

By this union Mary becomes in very truth the Mother of God. Just as merely human parents are truly regarded by us as the procreators of their children, so is Mary the Mother of the God-Man, the Mother of God;

and yet ordinary parents are not the authors of their children's souls, because these, being spiritual, are directly created by God; but because of the intimate union between soul and body, human parents are the parents, not merely of their children's bodies, but of their persons. And so, too, with Mary: because of the substantial union between Christ's human nature and His Divine Person, she is the Mother, not merely of His human nature, but of His Divine Person—the Mother of the God made man, the Mother of God.

Therefore, Mary is no ordinary woman. She is the Mother of God, and the honor of the Mother is the honor of her Divine Child. Even among men no son, with any vestige of decency and humanity left, will permit without indignant protest any insult or slight to his mother. It was God who planted this instinct of holy reverence in the hearts of human children. If this is so remarkable even in ordinary mortals, how great, how infinite, must love for Mary, His Mother, be in the all-loving Heart of Jesus, her divine, infinitely perfect Son!

ALL GENERATIONS SHALL CALL HER BLESSED

And has not God Himself emphasized her preëminence? Did He not foretell her as the Valiant Woman whose heel would crush the serpent's head? Did not His prophets herald her coming as the Mother of the Messiah, the Redeemer of the world? Did not He, the Emperor of highest Heaven, send her an angelic ambassador to solicit her cooperation in the mystery of the Incarnation, when that radiant messenger saluted her as full of grace and blessed among women? Did not the saintly mother of John the Baptist, inspired by the Holy Ghost, likewise greet her as singularly blessed when she welcomed her virginal guest and adored the Divine Child in her womb? Aye, indeed blessed is Mary, and all generations have called her, and shall call her, blessed, because He that is mighty hath done great things in her.

This, then, is the refutation of the first objection raised against devotion to Mary. It has no foundation in fact; neither has the second, as we shall now show.

THE MEDIATRIX OF GRACE AND PRAYER

Our Protestant friends assert that though devotion to the Blessed Virgin be reasonable in itself, it detracts from the worship that is due to Christ, and therefore it ought to be considerably modified, if not altogether discouraged. They are very flippant in their frequent quotation of St. Paul's words addressed to St. Timothy: "There is one God, and one mediator of God and men, the man Jesus Christ" (1 Tim. ii. 5). According to their interpretation of this text, every other mediatorship is excluded, and therefore the Apostle of the Gentiles, indirectly at least, condemns devotion to the Saints and the Blessed Virgin Mary. But we would remind them that St. Paul speaks of a mediator who is such by his own merits, and not one whose power is derived from a Higher Being, for the Apostle immediately adds: "Who gave Himself a redemption for all." We concede readily enough that in this restricted sense there is only one mediator; in fact, the Catholic Church is most emphatic with regard to this truth. Does not the Council of Trent lay down explicitly that there is only one mediator—Jesus Christ; but it also contends that the invocation of Mary and the Saints does not interfere one whit with this supreme mediatorship. Christ is the one mediator of justice; the Blessed Virgin and the Saints are mediators of grace and prayer. They are the very dear and honored friends of the King, they are the courtiers in His Royal Palace, but they are pledged to us by the Communion of Saints, and hence our confidence that petitions in our behalf, offered up by the Saints, and more especially by the Queen of Heaven, the Mother of God, are sure to be granted. Christ's supreme mediatorship does not exclude the mediation by the Saints, and so it is that we find St. Paul, whom Protestants like to quote in favor of their attitude in this matter, actually points to the Saints, and even to the faithful on earth, as mediators between God and man (Ephes. vi. 18; Rom. xv. 30).

FOLLOWING THE DIVINE EXAMPLE

Therefore, you see that the argument that devotion to Mary detracts from the worship due to Christ has no force whatever. Furthermore, it is based upon a supposi-

tion that is absolutely false. Our critics do not, or will not, see the distinction between the homage we pay to Christ, and the honor we pay to Mary; in fact, they suppose that the two are the same. This is utterly erroneous. The honor we pay to Christ is absolute and divine; the honor we pay to Mary is always relative and human; the one is adoration, Divine worship in its strict sense; the other is only veneration. We adore Christ as God; we reverence Mary as the greatest friend of God. We worship Christ on account of His infinite eternal perfection; we venerate Mary because she is the fairest work of God's hands. In fine, we honor her because her Divine Son honored her, and we believe that we are imitating Christ when we give to Mary, His Mother, the wealth of affection we lavish upon her. Hence, devotion to Mary does not detract from devotion to Christ, because they are different in kind, and the one is intimately entwined with the other.

This is no mere theory, for it is perfectly borne out in practice. It is a historical fact that our Church, which has always cherished the warmest love for the Mother of Christ, has also been at all times the most loyal defender of Christ's Divinity. Let me quote a very pertinent passage from Cardinal Newman: "If we look through Europe, we shall find, on the whole, that just those nations and countries have lost their faith in the Divinity of Christ who have given up devotion to His Mother, and that those, on the other hand, who had been foremost in her honor have retained their orthodoxy."—("Difficulties of Anglicans," vol. 2, p. 92.)

Even the rationalist Lecky, in his book, "Rationalism in Europe," has been compelled to state this fact: "Seldom or never has there been an ideal which has exercised a more salutary influence than the medieval conception of the Virgin" (p. 234).

HER MATERNAL LOVE AND BENIGN INFLUENCE

Not only, then, does devotion to Mary not interfere with devotion to our Blessed Lord, but it is a splendid and most efficacious means of persevering in the Christian faith. From the earliest centuries she has been signally honored by all true Christians, and successive Pontiffs have recommended to their subjects Mary's maternal love

and benign influence. The veneration of our Blessed Lady is as old as the Church itself; and rightly so, for Mary's Son established that Church, and Mary was that Son's most devoted disciple. She was the aurora before the dawn, the morning star that heralded the day of redemption; in fact, inasmuch as a human creature could participate in the regeneration of fallen humanity, though in an infinitely lesser way than He, the holocaust for sin, she was the co-redemptrix with Jesus of the human race.

And so, from the beginning of the Church's history until now, Mary's position in the Church has remained unique. As circumstances of time and place demanded it, new devotional practices in her honor have been introduced and new feasts have been instituted, but the principles underlying these various outward expressions of devotion to Mary have ever been the same. There has been a development from within, but no addition from without; there has been growth of veneration, but no loss of identity. Almost every devotion practiced in her honor has for its object some one of the splendid prerogatives enumerated in her beautiful Litany, yet that Litany has come down from the first ages of Christianity. So, too, her feasts; nearly all of them originated in the early centuries. Even the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, commemorating a prerogative which was proclaimed an article of faith some sixty years ago, was celebrated in some Eastern churches as early as the sixth century. Indeed, almost all her feasts had their origin in the spontaneous devotion of the faithful. This remarkable spread of devotion to Mary is a marvelous fulfilment of her own prophecy: "From henceforth all generations shall call me blessed, because He that is mighty hath done great things to me" (Luke i. 48, 49).

VENERATION BY THE CHILDREN OF THE GAEL

And so Mary's place in the Church of Christ is in accordance with the will of her Divine Son singularly pre-eminent. Those of us whose faith is strong can ascribe our loyalty to Jesus to our love of Mary. What fragrant and beautiful memories of Mary's month in Ireland those of us who lived in that remarkably Catholic country brought away with us! We recall the pealing of the vil-

lage bells in the evening air, the eager crowds, young and old, hastening to kneel before the beauty of our Lady's altar, the crooning of earnest voices lifted up in prayer from churches and from homesteads when, in the twilight hour, all over the land, the children of the Gael recited Mary's Rosary. Those memories, crowding as they come, reproduce the sweet freshness of children's voices when hymns to Mary were sung with soul-stirring fervor. We see again the flowers and the lights that made Mary's shrines radiant and lovely; we remember the ideals we formed, and the loyalty to Faith and all that it stands for we pledged ourselves to under the sweet patronage of Mary, our fair Lady, our Mother, and our Queen. Truly, the faith of Ireland was magnificent then, and it is, we are told, as wonderful now as ever, thanks to the unswerving devotion of Ireland's sons and daughters to the Immaculate Mother of God.

HER UNDYING PRAISE DOWN THE YEARS

Yes, dearly beloved, Mary is a tremendous personality in the Church of Christ. Nearly 2,000 years have passed by since the Virgin Mother beheld in prophetic vision the love and veneration of peoples yet unborn, and all these ages are vocal with songs in her praise. As age after age rolled by, nation vied with nation in proclaiming her prerogatives and extolling her virtues. And today it matters not where you travel—you may sojourn in Green Erin, the gem of the Northern Seas, or in any of the countries of old Europe, or in the Far East, where new apostles are bearing the banner of Christ, or in any city of prosperous America, or in our own dear Australia—everywhere will you hear the salutation: "Ave Maria! Hail Mary!"

Who among the children of men has ever been honored with such undying fame? There have been queenly women, adorned with the regal diadem, who were the idols of their people, yet they have passed away, and their names are almost forgotten. There have been kings and generals and conquerors and patriots whose names men used to conjure by, yet they have passed into the oblivion of the tomb; but one there has been, and one there is, whose glory shall not vanish, and whose name shall not

be forgotten as long as there is a God in heaven and Christ's Church shall endure upon earth, and she is Mary; the Mother of God.

Mary's Son is God and Man

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WE saw in our last lecture that the expectation of a Messiah, an expectation which was built upon a divine Promise, renewed at different periods, had become the hope of the human race from the beginning, and was the strength and support of the Jewish race for over two thousand years.

The people of Israel looked forward to the advent of the Deliverer, and this expectation it was which was the life and soul of national thought and national activity.

For two thousand years, that is, from the beginnings of the Jewish nation, seers and prophets had foretold Him Who was to come. He was to be the Christ—the Anointed One: He was to be the Prince of Peace; the Counsellor; God the Mighty; Father of the World to come. He was to be born of a Virgin, was to spring from the Royal house of David, and in the words of Micheas, "Out of Bethlehem shall He come forth that is to be the Ruler in Israel" (v. 2).

His was to be a life of hardship, of accumulating jealousy against Him; and finally a death of agony and shame was to be the close and climax of His life. That agony and humiliation was foretold in detailed and definite terms.

GOD MADE MAN

I asked in my first lecture: Has Prophecy been fulfilled?

Tonight I answer that question: The promise and prophecies which foretold the coming of the Mediator between God and man, the Deliverer of His people, the Desired of the nations were fully and perfectly in one person and in one alone—Jesus Christ.

He is therefore, God Incarnate, God made man, God and man, Divine and human, all of which is expressed by the Evangelist in one sentence: "The Word was with God: the Word was God; . . . and the Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us."

The Incarnation is therefore the fulfilment of prophecy and its realization. The Incarnation is the historical confirmation of every promise and prophecy made regarding the Desired of nations.

THE INCARNATION

The Incarnation means that God, Eternal and Almighty God, Who alone is, Who has ever been, Who shall ever be; Who is the Creator and Conserver of every thing—took to Himself our human nature and became man at a definite time in the history of humanity, and that in becoming man, He did not cease to be God.

The very thought of such an event has startled human minds, and some men, measuring God's Omnipotence by the standard of their own feeble power; measuring the Infinite by the finite, have dared to say that such an event was an impossibility.

They have declared that the Word of God Incarnate only seemed to be man, but was not man in truth and reality. They have declared, on the other hand, and the rationalistic teacher of the present day declares, that Jesus Christ was purely human, only a man, but certainly not Divine in the strict, absolute sense of the term.

They tell us that though He called Himself, and was called by others, the Son of God, the title only meant that, the gifts of grace, the gifts of the Spirit of God, were poured out upon Him as they were upon every other human being, with this difference, that He received these gifts and favors more fully and more perfectly than any other creature.

They profess to admire the lofty teaching, the courage, uprightness, fearlessness of Jesus Christ, and in the words of one of them, "humanity has no nobler or diviner figure than His." But He is human and only human, according to them: a kind of ideal or super-man. God He is not and never was!

Against such assertions, one voice rings out in pro-

test. It reaches far back to the beginnings of Jewish history, and speaks in the language of the Prophets of Israel. It is filled with the strength of Isaías; the thunders of Ezechiel are heard in it; and the plaint of Jeremias. It has the sweetness of the royal singer in its tones. It has the might, and power, and authority of the Christ Himself—the Christ of prophecy, the Christ of history; the Christ of Bethlehem and of Calvary—and the Christ of the Resurrection Morn. It has the courage of countless martyrs and of valiant confessors; of Apostles and of Apostolic men in every age and country and people! Aye! it has the grandeur and majesty and weight of over nineteen hundred years thrilling through it, and that voice proclaims tonight what it has proclaimed throughout the ages.

HE IS GOD INCARNATE

Jesus Christ is God, really, substantially, essentially and necessarily. He is of the same nature and substance as the Father and the Holy Ghost. He is Uncreated, Eternal, Absolute, and Self-existing.

Jesus Christ is man, really, substantially and essentially. He came on earth not in appearance only, not in any vague, undefined or shadowy form: not in the semblance of human nature, but "He was conceived by the Holy Ghost and was born of the Virgin Mary," "He suffered and died," and "He arose again the third day from the dead."

Therefore, Jesus Christ possessed a double nature—and one Person. He had the Divine nature which was His from all eternity, incommunicable and absolute: and He assumed human nature, in the fulness of time. These two natures subsisted in one Person, and that Person was the Word, eternal, changeless, infinite—the Son of God. For a better understanding of this doctrine, let us see what is meant by the terms "nature" and "person."

"NATURE" DEFINED

By the term "nature" we mean that which makes a thing what it is; or, in other words, the essential qualities and properties of a thing. By essential qualities, we mean those which cannot be dispensed with, or destroyed with-

out the destruction of the thing itself. For instance—a rational soul is essential to man. It is the possession of this principle of thought, will, and rational life which raises man above the level of the animal.

Take away the rational soul, take away this principle of rational life and activity, and the being is no longer human, though every bodily organ remains intact and perfect. That being has been deprived of what was essential to it, and hence it is that, even if it preserve the outward form and appearance of a human being it is not really such, it is merely a corpse!

But, leave the rational soul; leave the principle of rational life; leave the powers of mind and will, and strike that being blind, deaf, dumb; maim every bodily organ; rob it of all power of motion—that being is still human, because the essential quality remains, the distinguishing characteristic of the human being is still in its possession.

But "nature" is an abstract term; it is something universal which does not exist except in the individual. We speak of human nature and animal nature, but we never come in touch with either one or the other except in individual cases. Hence that in which the "nature" is existent; that which encompasses, defines, and, as it were, circumscribes the "nature" by making it an existing actuality, is the person or the personality.

"PERSON" DEFINED

By a "person" or a personality, we mean "an actually existing individual intellectual being." We speak of a human personality, of an angelic personality, of a Divine personality, and in doing so we speak of some individual, possessed of intellectual life, actually existing in human form; or as a pure spirit; or as the self-existing, absolute, therefore eternal, Being. It is the person or the personality who unifies and unites. It is the person or the personality who separates and divides, upholds, defines, and individualizes the "nature."

In the Incarnation, in the conception of the Messiah, in the Messiah Himself, there was only one Person who upheld and supported two natures—the Divine and the human. That Person existed from all eternity: the Per-

son of the Word of God—the Person of the Son, distinct from the Person of the Father, and the Person of the Holy Ghost.

The Person of the Word upheld the Divine nature eternally existing, and the human nature which was assumed on a certain day, in a definite period of this world's history, and in a certain definite place on this earth. When this event occurred, the Divine promise made to fallen man was fulfilled, the prophecies of the ages were realized—and He Who united in Himself heaven and earth, eternity and time, God and man became the "cornerstone" of creation, the central point and figure in the history of God's dealing with man. A modern writer says:

Israel did not produce either before or after the Incarnation, a single personality to whom the Messianic prophecies could be applied with any show of reason. Numbers of false Messiahs arose; but each of them has miserably failed. Alone, the Virgin's Son is uplifted to the Throne of God, to be seen of all nations and to be adored by them as the Christ, the Son of God.

MIRACULOUS CONCEPTION

Let us see how promise and prophecy was fulfilled.

In the promise made to fallen man, two beings are foretold: "the seed" of the woman, and "the woman." That promise points to a miraculous conception, for it clearly states that woman, not man, shall be the link which will unite the Redeemer to the race of men that is to be redeemed. Two beings, therefore, stand out on the borderland of time and eternity, inseparably united, who shall bear the closest relationship each to the other, that can be borne—the relationship which exists between a child and his mother.

That relationship had been decreed by the eternal God Himself—and God does not work by chance. When He works, He chooses; and prepares beforehand those whom He chooses, that they may be fitted for the work. He decreed the Incarnation: therefore He decreed the Divine maternity.

He decreed that His Anointed One, His Son, should become man; therefore He prepared beforehand the woman whom He had chosen to be the mother of the "Word made Flesh." Therefore, she should be absolutely perfect as a

creature, for why should God seek imperfection? His Son made man was to be the Ideal Man: therefore the mother that bore Him must be the Ideal Woman—the Woman of the Promise.

What kind of mother should she be? The promise, as I have said, points to a miraculous manner of conception—and that miraculous conception is defined for us by the prophecy of Isaiah: "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son."

HIS BIRTHPLACE

The place is foretold by Micheas: "Thou, Bethlehem, Ephrata, art a little one among the thousands of Juda: Out of thee shall He come forth that is to be the Ruler in Israel."

The words of Jacob tell us—"The sceptre shall not be taken away from Juda, nor a ruler from his thigh, till He come that is to be sent, and He shall be the expectation of nations."

The time is still further defined by the prophecy of Daniel. Now take up the records which are to be found in the Gospels and in the Epistles of St. Paul. Originally the "good tidings" were spoken to the people; but as time passed, and the first Apostles were growing old, they committed the things which they "had seen and heard" to writing, and so we have the New Testament, which is the confirmation of the Old Testament, and the record of the realization of what the Old Testament promised.

What do we find in those records? We see one Figure standing out clear against the background of promise, and prophecy, and type as their actual fulfilment. We come face to face with one Personality, around whom everything else is arranged, upon whom the past and the future converge, to whom every one is turned in love and gratitude with yearning, hope, doubt or antagonism, for He is the central point of history and cannot be ignored. We hear Him speak and proclaim that He is indeed the Son of Man whom Daniel foretold; the Virgin's Son Whom Isaiah prophesied: the Deliverer, the Long Desired, the Prince of the House of David whose praises David sang a thousand years before.

IN NAZARETH

We kneel in awe within a little village home in Nazareth, and gaze with love and reverence at a maiden whose eyes are homes of purity and peace. She is poor and lowly, but the blood of royal ancestors flows through her veins. She can trace her lineage back through the centuries to the Psalmist King; back still further to the son whom Jacob blessed, Juda, whose last King was even then seated upon a tottering throne.

A messenger from the Most High bends low before her as a subject bows before his queen. He speaks; and at his words the lifeless dust of Hebrew kings, the seers, and prophets, and patriarchs—aye, the dust of the progenitors of the human race is stirred within their unknown tombs—for this Virgin is hailed by the angel of God as "Blessed amongst women."

The designs of God are unfolded before her, and she learns that she is to become the mother of the Promised One; and that she will be a mother though still remain a virgin, for—"the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee; and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee; and therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

The maiden of Nazareth gives her consent, and the promise made of old is fulfilled, for the woman is on earth who is to crush the serpent's head, and the sign which Isaias gave to Achaz has appeared—a virgin has conceived.

Full well might Mary sing her canticle of praise and glory, on the hills of Judea, that the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob had "visited His people" at last. Never, as long as eternity should last, could the link which bound her to her Son be broken. Never as long as God should be, could the crown of virginal motherhood be snatched from her brow, for it had been placed there by the hands of God Himself.

BETHLEHEM

The days passed, and a Roman Emperor in his pride of power orders a census of his people, according to their race and ancestry. Follow the Virgin Mother as she

goes with her spouse St. Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem. There is no room for them in the hostels, but they find rest in a wayside cave.

THE LONG DESIRED.

And it came to pass, that when they were there, her days were accomplished, that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born Son.

Shepherds on the plains hard by heard the sound of singing and—

An angel of the Lord stood by them, and the brightness of God shone round about them: and they feared with a great fear,

until the angel bade them to rejoice, for—

This day is born to you a Savior Who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David.

Thou, Bethlehem Ephrata, art a little one amongst the thousands of Juda: out of thee shall He come forth that is to be the Ruler in Israel!

He has come at last—the Long Desired! Ye prophets hush your voices, for now your prophecies are fulfilled. Ye weary ones, whose eyes have turned in longing for the day-spring, and ye, whose hearts have ached for the coming of the Messias, rejoice and be glad, for now the days of longing and of loneliness are past and gone forever, the heavens have dropped down dew from above, and, the clouds have rained the Just One.

The seventy weeks of Daniel's vision are at an end, and in that wayside shelter of Bethlehem, adored by shepherds, watched over by Joseph, sung to sleep by angels, and tended by Mary, His mother, there lies in a manger the Ruler of Israel, the Counsellor, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of Peace, God the Mighty!

SINCE NINETEEN CENTURIES

Nineteen hundred years have come and gone since the angels sang their "Gloria" midst the hills around Bethlehem. Nineteen hundred years have come and gone since they first brought those "tidings of great joy" to

the shepherds who kept the night watches over their flocks. Nineteen hundred years have come and gone since that first Christmas night when the shepherds said to each other—"Let us go over to Bethlehem, and let us see this word that has come to pass." And during those nineteen centuries the peoples of the earth have followed in the shepherds' footsteps, and have come, one by one, to that wayside Cave, to adore an Infant in His mother's Arms.

Oh! ye scoffers of Jesus Christ! Ye unbelievers and ye who mock at Him! You wise ones of the world of science and irreligion—rationalists and agnostics of the present and the past—bow your heads and veil your eyes in the presence of Eternal Wisdom—the Eternal Word—incarnate as a little child.

Are you the only ones who are right, and has the world gone astray for nineteen hundred years? Are you the only ones who are wise, and have "the Kings from the East," and the princes of the earth, the nations and peoples of every age and country, gone wrong when they came on bended knee to the Manger-Throne of the King of kings made man? Are you the only ones who are learned, and are the brightest intellects and greatest geniuses of nineteen hundred years no more than stammering fools in the presence of you—teachers of an hour?

Ah! let them rage and dispute—we know better than they. We take our places in that "multitude whom no man can number," and wend our way towards Bethlehem of Juda. We see the Child of Promise—the Child of Prophecy. His wondrous eyes read deep the secrets of our hearts—and His hands are outstretched towards us—and in our hearts the Angels' song makes music once again—"Glory be to God. Peace to men of goodwill."

As we gaze, our wills are softened, subdued and won. The peace of God encloses our life, that "peace which surpasseth all understanding." We are made strong in the strength of God, for our eyes have seen, and we have believed—that the Child of the Midnight Cave is Christ the Lord.

Our Country's Patroness

Reprinted from AMERICA, December 4, 1915

AMONG the ceiling decorations of a certain well-known church is painted the shield of the United States, but above the *E Pluribus Unum* is inscribed another device, and among the State stars are to be found twelve others, woven into the field of blue. The legend is *Mater Admirabilis*, and the twelve stars are the stars in the crown of Heaven's Queen. For just as St. George is the patron of England, St. Denis of France, St. Boniface of Germany, St. Patrick of Ireland, and St. James of Spain; so by the mercy of God is the Blessed Mother the patron of our land. This title she holds, moreover, not merely by virtue of the fact that Our Lady presides over the destinies of all Christian peoples, but she has won it by a special claim, for the Catholics of this country have chosen as their ambassador at the court of Heaven and as their country's guardian, no less a person than Our Savior's own Mother. According to an old tradition, however, the special title under which we honor our patroness is that of the Immaculate Conception. As long ago as 1760, the Spanish colonies in America called Mary Conceived without Sin their special patroness; under the same title the Sixth Provincial Council of Baltimore chose Mary as the patroness of the United States and later the decree was officially confirmed at Rome. Finally the Eighth Council of Baltimore began its deliberations by recording the joy that the Fathers felt at the recent definition of Our Lady's Immaculate Conception.

It is eminently fitting that she who was always free from every stain and blemish should be chosen as the guardian of all that is best in American civilization. The fact that every worthy aspiration of our countrymen will be favored in Heaven by so strong an advocate as Mary should make us confident that the springs of our national life will be kept pure. To us, however, it belongs to see that our aims and ambitions as Americans shall always be those our Immaculate Patroness can further.